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ABSTRACT

This study investigated Ontario school council inclusiveness pertaining to Aboriginal peoples. A case study was conducted with a cross section of Native and non-Native Canadians who were directly or indirectly involved in school council-related activities. Researchers audiotaped interviews and focus group discussions with participants and analyzed archival materials (newspaper articles, school council minutes, journal articles, books, and school council materials). Overall, school councils were an externally imposed mandated reform that was not necessarily widely supported by trustees, administrators, and teachers, all of whom appeared threatened by parent and community participation. Council members were not necessarily knowledgeable about their roles and responsibilities. Principals tended to dominate the school council process but lacked the skills to advocate for change, share power, provide appropriate leadership, and develop a vision of school governance. School councils were not inclusive of Native Canadians, so the education, social interests, needs, and expectations of Native parents and community members were not being considered. Results revealed the need for a school council system involving Aboriginal parental, elder, and community participation in order to improve inclusiveness and educational relevancy, excellence, and equity in public education for Aboriginal peoples. (Contains bibliographic references.) (SM)

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NALL Working Paper #23-2001

DISCURSIVE POWER AND PROBLEMS OF NATIVE INCLUSIVENESS IN THE PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM: A STUDY OF MANDATED SCHOOL COUNCILS*

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DISCURSIVE POWER AND PROBLEMS OF NATIVE INCLUSIVENESS IN THE PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM: A STUDY OF MANDATED SCHOOL COUNCILS*

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Presented at the XXVI Annual Conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE), Aboriginal Education Day Session - Comparative and International Education Society of Canada (CIESC), University of Ottawa, May 1998.

*The research project pertaining to Native inclusiveness in school councils was carried out within the context of a larger study entitled "The Implementation of School Councils and Impacts on School Environment", a project which was funded through the Ministry of Education and Training of Ontario, Transfer Grant Competition. The ideas of this paper were developed as part of the OISE/UT New Approaches to Lifelong Learning (NALL) Project which is an initiative funded through the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) Strategic Research Networks in Education Grant. While this manuscript reflects, solely, the views of the author, the author wishes to acknowledge the financial support of MET and SSHRC.

Abstract

The study investigated school council inclusiveness pertaining specifically to Aboriginal peoples. The findings reveal the need of a school council system of Aboriginal parental, elder and community participation and involvement as a strategy leading to improved Native inclusiveness and education relevancy, excellence and equity in the public education system, pertaining specifically to Aboriginal children, youth and adults.

> Sadly, our history with respect to treatment of Aboriginal people is not something in which we can take pride. Attitudes of racial and cultural superiority led to a suppression of Aboriginal culture and values. As a country, we are burdened by past actions that resulted in weakening the identity of Aboriginal peoples, suppressing their languages and cultures, and outlawing spiritual practices. We must recognize the impact of these actions on the once self-sustaining nations that were desegregated, disrupted, limited or even destroyed by the dispossession of traditional territory, by the relocation of Aboriginal people, and by some provisions of the Indian Act. We must acknowledge that the result of these actions was the erosion of the political, economic and social systems of Aboriginal people and nations. ...One aspect of our relationship with Aboriginal people over this period that requires particular attention is the Residential School system. This system separated many children from their families and communities and prevented them from speaking their own languages and from learning about their heritage and cultures. In the worst cases, it left legacies of personal pain and distress that continue to reverberate in Aboriginal communities to this day. Tragically, some children were the victims of physical and sexual abuse... (Government of Canada, 1998)

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This quotation is taken from the Statement of Reconciliation: Learning from the Past, a statement on behalf of the Government of Canada, disseminated widely throughout Canada. I chose this quotation because it captures one of the central interpretive frames of this case study research project. The research explored Native inclusiveness in school council structures, practices involving policies, membership processes, and mandate. The study identifies themes in the school council field, including attitudes of racial and cultural superiority, coercive relations of power, and the tendency to not regard or value the Aboriginal peoples as a distinct and unique peoples. In short, factors which hinder and/or enhance education excellence, education relevancy and education equity, pertaining specifically to Aboriginal students in the public education system, receives no attention in the school governance or education reform literature. The same is true with respect to factors of public system education which contribute to the ongoing suppression of Aboriginal[1] culture, values and self-determination.

This paper brings into perspective, features of policies, practices and experiences of those involved in the school governance (school council) field. It also highlights implications of those policies, practices and experiences as the work of councils in the public education system pertains specifically to the education of Aboriginal children, youth and adults. There is a need for school governance to be theorized and discussed in a manner that invites the potential of open, honest critical dialogue on a range of issues including socio-political power relations between the wider provincial education process, district school boards and the governing bodies of local schools; and socio-political power relations in the school governance (school council) process, itself. Public system schooling, educational reforms, school council policies and the activities of school governance also need to be theorized and discussed within a possibility of non-Native Ministry of Education and Training personnel, elected school board trustees, school principals, teachers, and school council members recognizing their own agency and legitimate place within the struggle of bringing about cultural change in schools. Fundamental changes in school and community relationships and the culture of schools if education policies and practices of the past, which sought to assimilate and/or integrate Aboriginal children, youth and adults through public system schooling, are not repeated in the present or carried forward into the future.

Provincial schools[2] do not have a history of welcoming Aboriginal students in a Native inclusive manner (Burns and Gamlin, 1995; Burns 1997; Burns and Beaudin, 1997). One of the implications of the findings of this cast study is that Native inclusiveness in the public education system needs to become a public policy goal. Native inclusiveness in education is rooted in fundamental beliefs which result in respect of the Aboriginal people as a people who are distinct and unique, respect of Native self-determination and respect of Aboriginal self-governance. The Aboriginal people are a people who are striving to regain greater degrees of parental and community involvement in education as well as control over Native education, where Native control of education is the preferred option of First Nations. The focus of such an approach pertaining to school councils and education in the public system of education is on respect and integrity, including respect and integrity of Native world views; Native knowledge and experience; Native language; Native spirituality; Native history; Native culture; Native traditions; Native systems of social organization; and Native beliefs, values, attitudes, and norms underpinning Native practices (see in particular, Burns and Gamlin, 1995; Burns, 1996a, 1996b, 1998a; Burns and Beaudin, 1997, Hampton, 1988). Instead, schools tend to view the Native people as stereotypes rather than as a distinct people with a distinct heritage, rich history, and world view of their own (Burns, 1997a).

It is clear that education has served as an instrument of cultural genocide of the Native people. The public system of education continues to serve as an instrument of acculturation and assimilation and therefore, as an instrument of cultural genocide. Education practices in mainstream provincial schools involve both elements of the formal curriculum and the less visible hidden dimensions of curriculum encompassing the interactional, social, management and organizational aspects of teaching and learning (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993; Apple, 1990; Hernandez, 1989; Giroux and Purpel, 1983; Giroux and Penna, 1979). Elements of both the formal curriculum of the school and the informal or hidden curriculum of the school combine in a way whereby they contribute to a systematic weakening of Native identity, the development of an insecure sense of Native self-worth among Native children, youth and adults, and an overall eroding of both social cohesion and self-determination of the Aboriginal Peoples as a distinct and unique peoples, a self-determining people, a self-governing people. For the Native people, these are the social facts as they relate to the schooling of their children in the public education

system.

Where the preferred option of First Nations is First Nations/provincial school board negotiated tuition agreement schooling, First Nations are committed to achieving more meaningful involvement of parents, elders and the community in education. More meaningful involvement is an important strategy for achieving greater degrees of Native inclusiveness, Native relevance, excellence and equity in education pertaining specifically to Native children, youth and adults (Burns and Beaudin, 1997). This is also true with respect to Aboriginal students living in urban communities. For Aboriginal children, youth and adults provincial school board relations of power and education get played out as either instruments of domination, control, oppression, domestication, assimilation and loss of freedom or as instruments of collaborative relations of power and education resulting in self-determination and relevance, excellence and equity in education. The former is associated with a notable lack of Native inclusiveness in education, a problematic which ought to be of moral concern of provincial governments, MET, school boards, school governance organizations and public schools employees whose policies, social and political power relations and day-to-day practices affect the life styles and the life chances of Native children, youth and adults, in perpetuity.

School Governance

All education governance, school governance (school councils), and education reforms in the public education system involve socially organized systems of social and political power relations. Aboriginal students are a distinct and unique social category of students comprising the overall demographics of the public education system. Aboriginal students, more than other social categories of students, have been affected negatively by coercive systems of social and political power relations within the public system of education. As a result, education governance, school governance (school councils) and education reforms, in the public education system as they pertain to Aboriginal children, youth and adults, are areas worthy of study in their own right.

In England, in many of the United States, and in Australia, Canada and New Zealand, governments have mounted, in the name of empowering parents, open assaults on school boards and their staffs, usually characterized as the bureaucracy (Canadian Principal, 1996). This is a situation which is also occurring in Ontario. In Ontario, the provincial government has consolidated more than 168 school boards into 72 district school boards and 37 school authorities; the number of elected trustees has been reduced substantially, and school councils have been mandated. These changes have taken effect in the name of empowering parents, empowering communities, achieving efficiencies and improving education for students. But, is this the effect reforms are having on Aboriginal parents, Aboriginal communities, and Aboriginal students? I think not.

Support for establishing school parent councils is widespread in Ontario. The majority of citizens in Ontario fully expect school parent councils to improve the quality of education in schools in the public education system. In a report on public attitudes towards education in Ontario, Livingstone, Hart and Davie (1 995) present data which reveals that 85 % of respondents favoured a school council policy and the majority of respondents from upper income (5 8 %), middle income (72 %) and lower income (66 %) areas believe that the quality of education will improve with school parent councils. The nature of support for establishing school councils and of expectations of school councils raises important questions: To what extent do the parents/guardians of Aboriginal students and parents/guardians of non-Aboriginal students expect school councils to improve the quality of education for Aboriginal students? To what extent does the provincial government, MET, provincial school board trustees, school principals, classroom teachers, and members of school councils expect school councils to improve the quality of education pertaining specifically to Aboriginal students? And, by what means and through whose determination?

Education governance and education governance policy studies date back to the nineteenth century (Deem, Brehony, and Heath, 1993). Education governance theorist and applied scholars tend to approach the study of education governance from conceptually different, but interrelated vantage points: state focused policy studies (Hall 1988; Gipps, 1993; Whitty, 1990; Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973); policy process studies (Ham and Hill, 1984; Hill, 1993); organization and organization change focussed studies (Clarke, Cochrane and McLaughlin, 1994); and studies which focus on active democratic/social

citizenship (Agocs, Burr, and Sommerset, 1992; Roche, 1992; Turner, 1993).

Within the context of these various vantage points, the case study to which I refer in this paper is holistic in approach; it stems from aspects of each orientation. The case study addresses factors and themes in the school council policy process within situations involving education governance, school governance, education and Native inclusiveness issues. The overall approach provides the basis for discussing relations of power and how coercive relations of power, ethnocentricism, attitudes of racial and cultural superiority, the denial of difference and the suppressing of difference as a response to the Aboriginal peoples have operated historically in educational settings to assimilate Aboriginal students including First Nations students. In education, coercive relations of power have the effect of reproducing societal inequalities through schooling. Coercive relations of power refer to the exercise of power by a dominant group, individual or country to the detriment of a subordinate group or individual or country (Cummins, 1995). Such a discussion is basic to any attempt to bring about meaningful, long lasting education change, school council change, school and Native community relations and involvement change, and Native inclusive education change pertaining specifically to Aboriginal children, youth and adults. Such change can be conceptualized within the context of effective implementation of school council concepts, ideas, policies, innovations and practices based on collaborative relations of power in the pursuit of Native inclusiveness in the public education system and relevance, excellence and equity in education pertaining specifically to Aboriginal students in the public education system.

Purpose, Strategy and Method

The methods used in the research project provide the basis for working toward a deeper theoretical and practical understanding (see Mouzelis, 1993) of the school council concept as reform and/or innovation, and the process of school councils in action. The overall approach can be characterized as multi-method, multi-site, case-study strategy (Merriams, 1988), involving a cross-section of selected Native and non-Native personnel who were either directly or indirectly involved in school council related activities, or otherwise aware of school councils and their manner of operation. Data collection involved the audio taping of a combination of semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The case study involved twenty-six respondents (eighteen of Native heritage and eight of non-Native heritage).

The Native respondents occupied a range of roles including situations at the level of individuality where some respondents occupied more than one role position. The categories of roles occupied by the Native respondents were as follows: parent, school council member, school council chairperson, First Nation chief, student, paid teaching aide, First Nation education counsellor, First Nation provincial school board trustee, member of Native advisory committee, classroom teacher, and school principal. Native respondent involvement in education and school council processes cut across a range of sites; five public school boards, one RCSS board, one First Nation board of education, one second level of service educational institute, four Native education authorities, two Native friendship centres, and one tribal council. First Nations respondents were directly or indirectly involved with more than twenty-six First Nations. At the school setting level, the Native respondents were directly associated with five non-Native schools. In some instances, Native respondents were able to address school council issues within the context of system-wide issues. For example, two Native trustees are trustees on a large RCSS board, one on a public board; all three spoke from a system-wide perspective. The same was true of several other Native respondents. Three respondents were directly involved in First Nations schools. While the case study touched on three First Nations schools, one education project involved a joint initiative of a First Nation and a provincial school board, one education project was operated jointly by a Native friendship centre and a provincial board of education. In all situations, all Native respondents described their school council observations and experiences as they pertained specifically to Aboriginal students, in the public education system.

Two non-Native respondents also occupied more than one role position. The overall role categories of non-Native respondents were as follows: school principal, student, parent, education officer (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, recently retired), community member, and senior education administrator involved in Native education programs and services. The non-Native respondents addressed school council issues within the context of two public school boards and one RCSS board of

education.

The case study also involved the acquisition and content analysis of archival materials including newspaper articles; school council minutes; journal articles; books; and Ontario Ministry of Education and Training (MET) school council materials - MET Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122 (1995), MET School Council Handbook - A Handbook for Members of School Councils (1996), and MET Getting Started Working Document - A Resource Guide for Establishing School Councils (1996) and various documents put into the public domain by the Education Improvement Commission.

Results

While it is impossible to present the entire body of work of the case study findings in any great detail in a paper of this nature, I will comment briefly on four distinct areas of the study: mandate, membership training and factors affecting implementation. I will also discuss briefly some of the theoretical directions and applied directions the work has taken and implications of such work for those interested in issues both of Native inclusiveness in the public education system and school councils as a strategy for improving- Native inclusiveness in the public system of education and for achieving excellence, relevance and equity in education pertaining specifically to Aboriginal children, youth and adults.

The normative obligation (mandate) of school councils, in Ontario, is clear; an overall mandate which is clarified in considerable detail in Policy/Program Memorandum 122 (1995) and related Ministry of Education and Training council resource materials. The policy/program memorandum (p. 3) states that school councils are advisory bodies which will provide advice to the school principal and, where applicable, to the school board on any of the following matters that the council has identified as priorities: local school calendar; school code of behaviour; curriculum and program goals and priorities; the response of the school or school board to achievement in provincial and board assessment programs; preparation of the school profile; selection of principals; school budget priorities including local capital improvement plans; school communication strategies; methods of reporting to parents and the community; extra-curricular activities of the school; school-based community partnerships related to social, health, recreational, and nutrition programs; community use of facilities; local co-ordination of services for children and youth; and development, implementation, and review of board policies at the local level.

A close examination of these provisions reveals that the roles and responsibilities of the school councils are broad in scope. They include areas of responsibilities in which parents can have considerable impact on schools and where Aboriginal parents/guardians, elders and the community can become potentially more meaningfully involved in the decision-making processes that affect the culture of the school including its formal and informal curriculum. Students from subordinated communities can become empowered in the school context to the extent that the communities, themselves, are empowered through their interactions with the school (Cummins, 1995). Given that discourses systematically form the objects of which they speak (Foucault, 1972), the absence of authentic Aboriginal voice in school governance organizations and in schools of the public system of education must be addressed.

Where is Aboriginal voice in public education system discourse? Where is Aboriginal voice in school governance discourse? Voice occurs within the context of social and political power relations. The various areas of school council responsibilities are areas around which open, honest, critical discourse (Aboriginal voice) regarding Aboriginal inclusiveness in education and education relevance, excellence and equity pertaining specifically to Aboriginal students needs to occur. With conditions of collaborative empowerment of school councils and meaningful involvement and participation of Aboriginal people (parents/guardians, elders and the community), school governance, schools and schooling in the public system of education has the potential of becoming inclusive of Aboriginal peoples. Schools also have the potential of becoming sites where education relevancy, excellence, equity and empowerment pertaining specifically to Aboriginal students can be achieved in practice among Aboriginal students; a social category of distinct and unique students in the public system of education.

The case study findings also provide evidence of the existence of a considerable gap between the

normative order and factual performance (Mizruchi, 1973) of school councils. The former has to do with state level statements of what school councils are expected to do as reflected in policy documents and/or protocols. The latter has to do with what school councils actually do and/or do not do; their factual performance. As an observer pointed out: "school councils ... are up and running but they are not necessarily running effectively'; this is an understatement at best!

The findings reveal that school councils are an externally imposed mandated reform or innovation in Governance which is not necessarily widely supported by elected school board trustees, senior administrators, principals or classroom teachers; all of whom appear to be threatened not only by parent and community participation and involvement in school governance, but also in terms of security of own positions. School councils appear to be implemented as ends rather than as changes in relationships contributing to meaningful school and/or education change. The case study findings do not provide evidence in support of the notion of school councils as a culture of collaborative relations of power resulting in meaningful involvement of parents, community and school system personnel in public system education. School councils, within the case study settings, do not appear to exist as sets of effective, collaborative relationships (see Burns and Smith, 1996) in which school personnel work along with parents and members of the community in an open, honest, and collaborative manner with a view to achieving greater degrees of social progress in education, education improvement, education accountability, or effectiveness in the overall operation of schools, including their programs and services. School councils, based on the case study data, appear to exist in terms of contrived school council membership and involvement!

The findings also reveal that school council members are not necessarily knowledgeable regarding their roles and responsibilities; in fact, there is widespread role ambiguity among the contrived council membership. The following verbatim comment is typical. It provides a partial perspective to school council implementation.

> ... I can look at the situation that we do have, and I go back to the point where the introduction of the school councils was not brought on favourably with the school board itself... The school councils were not brought on in a favourable fashion which has led to a really at-arms-length involvement, and with that, I really don't think that we're seeing the effectiveness of school council, at least in my area... I would go even to the point where I would think there's a level of confusion as to what a school council represents by the school council members and by the school board members; and this lack of co-operative approach to the delivery of education is disheartening at one end because you can see that there's potential for effectiveness of school councils, I think, when we look at what they can deliver... But, certainly, if it's not drawn out as to what they can and can't do, it leads to an awful lot of confusion... And, the boards are very reluctant to give in to school councils... And the third party is the school principal. You know, there is reluctance there... Well, at the board level, very little information has come back from school councils as to what areas they are involved with. And I say that not of just the reflection of the school council - it's a reflection on the school board for not inviting school councils to participate. There's no forum of how we interrelate, and I really believe that there's been a lost opportunity.

The findings reveal that principals tend to dominate the school council process including both the membership and the operational practices of the councils. This appears to be particularly true at the secondary -level where the roles and responsibilities of school councils members was often discussed in terms of fund raising; and endorsing the goals, values, and practices of the school and the board. Some respondents spoke of long, unproductive meetings, where council members come to increasingly learn that they have no real voice on any matters of importance to them, and that school councils do not exist as a leverage for change. One respondent expressed her secondary school council experience in the following ways, an experience not to be viewed as atypical.

> I became a member with a great deal of anticipation... I believe in the importance of school councils, in parent and community involvement in schools. The principal controls the school and controls the council, the superintendent controls the principal, and the trustees control the superintendent... We are not making any progress in the mandated areas you described to me... The principal is not open or honest... I have lost a part of my innocence

> regarding schools, education and parent involvement since being on the council... I'm frustrated... I will be withdrawing from the council... The secondary school system is in desperate shape, we're not allowed to be involved in anything meaningful...

The secondary school council (non-Native) member went on to say that she had eights years of great parental involvement at the elementary school level prior to the recent mandating of school councils and that she anticipated that secondary school involvement would be equally invitational and responsive to parental concerns. This individual indicated that her first-hand experience on the secondary school council was frustrating, alienating, and disillusioning, and that, if there was a private school in the area, she'd send her children there. It is not clear to this observer who it is school councils actually represent; who they communicate with outside of school walls; what ends they serve beyond being instruments of the school administration in preserving that status quo. The following verbatim comment provides further perspective to school council practices.

> One of the goals that I would like to see in the school council in light of effectiveness in the area of communication with the community that the school serves, and to be responsive to the community... We spend a lot of time communicating with ourselves ... we have no budget or method to communicate outside the council other than through word of mouth... We're not sure what we can actually talk about... Maybe our meetings are like in-camera, I don't know...

All this does not appear to bode well for school council reform as a strategy for achieving Native inclusiveness in schools. In the absence of altering the culture of education governance, school governance and schooling, little useful change is likely to occur in education. It is clear that there is a need of a praxis of meaningful change in both school governance and schooling practices, in the public education system.

Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122 states that the membership of mandated school councils must reflect the diversity of the school community and that parents and guardians must form the majority of the school council membership. The directive states that members of a school council shall include, but not be limited to, parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school; community representatives; a students (mandatory in secondary schools - at the discretion of the principal in elementary schools); the school principal; a teacher; and a non-teaching staff member. The normative order also requires that the membership of the school council shall be determined in the following ways: parents shall be elected by parents and guardians of students enrolled in the school; the chair of the council shall be a member who is also a parent and shall be elected by the council; community members shall be appointed by the council; the student representative shall be elected by students; the school principal shall be a designated member; the teaching representative shall be elected by members of the teaching staff; and the non-teaching staff shall be elected by colleagues.

A close examination of this policy statement reveals that the council membership and membership process provide the potential for active democratic citizenship, representation and direct involvement in education. Membership involves issues of representation including socially progressive processes leading to equitable representation of the membership reflecting the social diversity of the community of which Aboriginal peoples are a part. Content analysis of Policy/Program Memorandum No. 122 reveals that the normative order of school council membership appears to be democratic in intent. The case study findings reveal that at the level of practice there is a considerable gap between the normative intent of the school council membership and the factual performance of the school governance process as it pertains to membership. The gap between intent and factual performance has to do with matters concerning the extent to which membership reflects social diversity of the community and the various social and political processes leading up to who gets to be on school councils, who doesn't get to be on school councils within diversity, and the nature of discourse and voice within the membership once it has been consolidated.

The findings also raise questions as to whether schools actually exist as sites where the practice of cultural democracy actually occurs! And if not, can schools as non-democratic sites play proactively, meaningful roles in the development and implementation of school council policies and practices leading to active, democratic citizenship representation in the membership and active democratic involvement in

school governance practices? Meaningful Native representation on school council organizations and Native inclusiveness in schooling in the public system of education are highly unlikely to occur in the absence of schools in the public system of education becoming sites of cultural democracy; sites where coercive social and political relations of power simply do not exist; of if they do exist, cannot thrive!

The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) provides perspective to such social and political issues within the context of the direct, lived experiences of Aboriginal peoples.

> "...parental involvement and local control of schools are standard practice in Canada - but not for the Aboriginal people; instead, they have long been the object of attempts by state and church authorities to use education to control and assimilate them, during the residential school era, certainly, but also, more subtly, today. "

The Native people exist as a distinct and unique people, a self-determining people, a self-governing people, and a people seeking greater involvement and participation in schooling in the public system of education. It is vitally important that education governance reforms, school governance reforms and education reforms be viewed as instruments which have the potential of reaching out and involving Aboriginal parents in the education of their children, in ways previously denied them. This is essential if education in mainstream schools is to become a positive force in the pursuit of bicultural competence and confidence among Native children, youth and adults, as Native peoples; a peoples who are distinct and unique.

Numerous Native respondents are critical and forthright in their desire to have a Native position on school councils and the desire of meaningful process leading up to Native representation within the school council membership. The following verbatim comments provide a partial perspective to Native representation issues:

- I'm not even sure that there was specific reference made to Native representation on school council. You know as a parent ... and, with the population of Native people in the community, we've solicited through our First Nation education office different people that we know have kids in certain schools and have them consider sitting on parents council and we've done that as an education unit ... for parents who sit on the parents council and we do have Native parents on different councils, - there might be a general statement. But I don't think we had any when they instituted the process... there should be Native representation - encourage Native representation... It wasn't a matter of the community selecting. It was a matter of the Native parent going to the council and saying I'm interested in maybe serving on the school council.
- I was told by the school principal that they don't even have to have our Native communities on the school councils if they don't want to... Like that is the understanding that I got ... if we get to be asked to sit on a school council, we're supposed to feel that they're doing a favour for us ... kind of like honoured ... they get to pick who sits on the councils, right... I know our's got formed that way. I got the impression that's not the way it's supposed to be.
- I have to check on how people got on the council... I know two Native parents that put their name in at one of our larger elementary schools - not Native wise but population wise - and both were accepted on to the school council ... and I'm not sure if there was a need to do any elections there if they had the recommended amount of people besides what they really need ... so I'm not sure that there's been elections. I would think there's been solicited participation in some school councils.

Two Native respondents indicated that they were asked by the school principal to represent their respective First Nations. One was not a parent, the principal indicated that was not a factor. Another respondent indicated that there were others in the First Nation more interested and qualified than her to be on the council. The principal indicated she was the inductee. One respondent described the overall membership process as follows–

- The school board went through a campaign to inform the community of school councils. It went through that but I think that was almost an expectation that they had to follow through... I know our director posted an ad in the local papers that there would be a certain night that they'd be selecting. So, through an electoral forum, representation was selected from each community. The

board left the First Nations to their own selection. The First Nations reps in our area were elected by their respective Chief and Council... Would that imply that each school council has a First Nations member on it? It could have, not that they have, they could have. The opportunity was there...

A First Nation person described her school council experience in the following way:

- I heard through the grapevine that there was going to be a school council meeting at the school, so I went. I was told at this very first meeting that I couldn't be there ... I was really upset. And I said to the principal, you should have told me before I came here because you really put me in a bad position like what are you doing here? You don't have children in the school. You're not supposed to be here. You're not part of our committee... And I left, and he phoned me about a week later and said well I had a talk with the committee and they said it would be okay if you sat as part of the committee... I felt like saying to him well thank you very much for asking me - going and talking about it and letting me sit on your little group... And I guess I kind of got my back up because it was like forget it at that point...

School councils are also mandated to organize information and training sessions to enable members of the council to develop their skills as council members. Examination of the data derived from interviews and focus group discussions reveals there are numerous areas of need for comprehensive, ongoing in-service training and development of school council members, including principals, teachers, and parents.

The case study findings reveal that there is a particular need for principals to learn the skills required to advocate for change, to share power, to share opportunities, to provide leadership in implementing collaborative relations of power and in the development of a vision of school governance effectiveness. The findings also indicate that school council members must be provided opportunities to learn to work toward shared objectives, within diversity, through a process of bargaining, negotiation, collaboration, and conflict resolution in order to achieve progressive school, school council, and community goals.

School council members can also benefit from in-service opportunities leading to the development of knowledge and understanding of social facts pertaining specifically to the Native people including the fact that they exist as a people who are distinct and unique; they are a self-determining peoples; they are a self-governing people; and they have a right to be meaningfully involved in school governance and education affecting Native children, youth and adults. Within the context of Native inclusiveness issues, there is also a need for ongoing in-service geared to the development of strategies effective in reaching out to Aboriginal parents, elders and Aboriginal communities both within First Nations and in urban communities. There is also a demonstrable need to alter the culture of school governance organizations (school councils) and schools in Native inclusive ways. These are important first steps in any attempt to help Native children, youth and adults learn the skills needed to participate fully in the economy and to help them develop as citizens of Aboriginal nations -- with the knowledge of their language and traditions required for cultural continuity.

Discussion

Education research pertaining specifically to Aboriginal children, youth and adults in Canada is comprehensive. Both descriptive and analytic research characterizes in considerable detail federal government education themes and policies of segregation, assimilation (Armitage, 1995; Common and Frost, 1994; Frideres, 1993; Barman, Hebert and McCaskill, 1986, 1987), and more recently the integration of Aboriginal children in regular provincial schools via coercive master tuition agreement arrangements (Burns, 1996a, 1996b). The research also provides analyses of the manner in which attitudes of racial and cultural superiority manifested in coercive relations of power and education policies of segregation, education assimilation and education integration pertaining specifically to Aboriginal children, youth and adults, in Canada, the United States, New Zealand and Australia have had devastating affects on the First Peoples (Hirschfelder and Kreipe de Montano, 1993; Armitage, 1995; Welch, 1996, Corson, 1997). The historical legacy of education segregation, assimilation and integration policies and practices are not morally defensible in a Canadian democracy. The overall effects of integrative and assimilative schooling are also not acceptable to the Aboriginal peoples, of

Canada (Longboat, 1987; McDonald, 1997). There is a need of change in the public education system. School governance (council) reform can become an instrument of meaningful change.

There is a tremendous volume of comprehensive research directed towards the gaining of valuable insights into the nature and scope of changes needed in education policies and practices pertaining specifically to Aboriginal children, youth and adults in Canada. More notable papers, studies and reports put into the public domain over the past thirty years include: the federal government's White Paper4 - Statements of Government of Canada on Indian Policy (1969)[3], the National Indian Brotherhood response to the White Paper entitled "Indian Control of Indian Education" (1972), Assembly of First Nations Tradition and Education: Towards a Vision of Our Future (1988), MacPherson Report (1991), Report of the Royal Commission on Learning - "For the Love of Learning" (1994), the House of Common Report on Aboriginal Education (1996), and the five volume Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP, 1996). A close examination of these documents reveals that there is continuity of findings within research on Native education. The Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) is particularly revealing. It contextualizes both the past and the present in concluding that "the Aboriginal people have long been the object of attempts by the state and church authorities to use education to control and assimilate them, during the residential school era, but also more subtly, today". RCAP highlights the fact that the Aboriginal people want two main things from education: schools to help children, youth and adults to learn the skills they need to participate fully in the economy, and to help children develop as citizens of Aboriginal nations - with the knowledge of their languages and traditions necessary for cultural continuity. It is clear that the public education system fails to accomplish either of these goals. The six volume report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples is an important report. It is a report which should be read and then openly discussed by MET personnel, EIC personnel, elected trustees, education personnel and school council personnel of the public education system. Selected ideas of the report should be used as the basis for bringing about meaningful change in relations of power and in education.

To this day, the majority of Aboriginal youth do not complete high school, they leave high school with neither the credentials for jobs in the mainstream economy nor a grounding in their languages and cultures, and they are very likely to have experienced the ignorance and hatred of racism, which leaves them profoundly demoralized and angered (RCAP, 1996). Building upon the work of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, it is of utmost importance that provincial governments, Ministries of Education, school boards, public education system employees, public education system school council policy makers, and school governors (school council members) become cognizant of several facts:

- almost 70 percent of Aboriginal children are taught in provincial or territorial schools;
- mainstream educational systems have few mechanism of accountability to Aboriginal people;
- the mainstream education system has made few attempts to reach out and involve Aboriginal parents or the Aboriginal community in meaningful ways; and yet,
- the Aboriginal people continue to believe that education can be a positive force in the pursuit of cultural competence and confidence for their children and for themselves (RCAP, 1996).

These observations, concerns, and expectations relating to Native education raise important questions which need to be addressed by school board trustees, school personnel and members of school councils: What roles should school councils play in a democracy committed to a valuing of diversity and the valuing of the Aboriginal peoples as a distinct and unique peoples within diversity? What are the indicators of equity, social justice and due process of involvement in education in the public system of education? In what ways can school councils reach out and involve Aboriginal parents/guardians, elders and the Aboriginal community in schools and in the education of their children in the public education system? What are the roles of school councils in the improvement of school level education policy and practices pertaining specifically t 'o Aboriginal children, youth and adults attending schools in provincial school board jurisdictions? In what ways are school governance organizations currently addressing issues of inclusiveness, relevance, excellence and equity in education pertaining specifically to Aboriginal children, youth and adults, as determined by the Aboriginal peoples themselves? And, what is the vision of education of the school council as it pertains specifically to Aboriginal students from First Nations and urban communities?

By appearing to be an impartial and neutral transmitter of the benefits of valued culture, "the culture of domination", schools, in the public system of education, are able to engage in the production of inequality in mainstream education, under the guise of fairness, objectivity, and equal opportunity for all (Aronowitz and Giroux, 1993). The MET, EIC, district school boards and schools are not neutral. Public system education policies and practices, in Canada, pertaining specifically to Native children, youth and adults have been and continue to be paternalistic, racist, and discriminatory in character (Burns, 1996b). This has not been a happenstance; it has been a social intent! Residential schooling, mainstream schooling, and tuition agreement education have been used as instruments for achieving cultural genocide of the Native peoples. They have been instruments of acculturation, integration, assimilation and an overall eroding of both social cohesion and self reliance amongst the Aboriginal peoples as a distinct and unique peoples, as a self-determining peoples, and a people who aspire to regain voice over education affecting Aboriginal children, youth, and adults. Provincial school system policies and practices and school council policies and practices affect the Aboriginal people directly!

Aboriginal control of education and parental involvement are fundamental principles underpinning education pertaining to Aboriginal children, youth and adults. Relatedly, RCAP recommends that where Aboriginal children attend provincial schools, provincial governments take immediate steps to ensure that Aboriginal people are both involved fully and meaningfully involved in the decision-making processes that affect the education of their children. In the Province of Ontario, the provincial government, the Ministry of Education and Training, the Education Improvement Commission and the Ontario Parent Council should take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that Aboriginal people are fully involved in school council processes that affect the education of their children in the public system of education. Greater degrees of involvement and meaningful participation of Aboriginal people in education decision-making processes is required to achieve Native inclusiveness, Native relevance, excellence and equity in education pertaining specifically to Aboriginal children, youth and adults (Burns, 1996a).

History reveals that education pertaining specifically to Aboriginal children, youth and adults has been an instrument of domination.) control, assimilation, exploitation, domestication, and the marginalization of the Aboriginal peoples in the economy and mainstream society. It is also clear that education can become an instrument of self-determination, liberation, empowerment, and self-government. Formal education has been an instrument of the former and it must become an instrument of the latter! Work in the Native education field reveals that mainstream education, in provincial school systems, has been counter productive to the self-determination of the First Nations people as a People who are distinct and unique. School councils, in this light, can be seen as a strategy to redress problems of the past.

Education, in provincial schools, has worked at cross-purposes with the fundamental goals and ideals of Aboriginal peoples including First Nations, particularly as they relate to the social, economic, political, educational, kinship, heritage, spirituality, linguistic and cultural aspirations and expectations of the Native peoples as distinct and unique peoples in the fabric of Canadian society. In practice, the public system of education including mainstream tuition agreement education is notably non-inclusive of the Native peoples. The public system of education is a mode of education which is not responsive to the beliefs, values, language, heritage, spirituality, tradition, knowledge, experiences, history, and normative practices of the Aboriginal peoples. In fact, as it pertains to Aboriginal children, youth and adults, mainstream tuition agreement education is racist, discriminatory, and assimilative in character. Schools, in the public education system, are total institutions. Within the Eurocentric, white western paradigm of education, schools mirror the beliefs, values, traditions, practices and normative aspirations and expectations of those comprising the culture of domination in society (Burns, 1998). It is thus that schools continue to contribute to the suppression of Aboriginal culture and values, and to the assimilation of the Native peoples and to cultural genocide.

There is a need of a praxis of Native inclusiveness in the wider provincial education process, district school board jurisdictions, school governance organizations and schools as a strategy for achieving inclusion, relevance, excellence and equity in education pertaining specifically to Aboriginal students. Such a praxis is different from a praxis of coercive relations of power; a praxis of domination, control, assimilation, domestication, marginalization; and enculturation which sets out to enculturate Native children, youth and adults into the beliefs, values and practices of western and/or global institutions

through the vicissitudes of both the formal and informal curriculum of the school (see Burns, 1997a, 1998a, 1996b for an elaboration of such a praxis) and through school governance policies, structures, processes and practices. In such a praxis, it is necessary to focus on the existence of the Aboriginal peoples as a people who are distinct and unique, self-determined, self-governed in areas of inclusiveness and relevance, excellence and equity in education pertaining to Aboriginal students. Native inclusiveness in school councils and the practices of schools have implications for the extent to which relevance, excellence and equity in education pertaining specifically to Aboriginal children, youth, and adults is achievable in practice. Inclusiveness is also an essential prerequisite to the self-determination of the Native Peoples, as a distinct and unique peoples, in Canada.

Implications

Santayana (1905) concluded that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. In this observation, Santayana voices a concern not only about the importance of knowing about the details of the past in order to be able to deal with legacies of the past, but also the importance of knowing about, understanding and recognizing the mistakes of coercive relations of power of the past in order that the culture of coercive relations of power be altered to a culture of collaborative relations of power and empowerment. It is equally important to recognize, know about and understand the nature of our own agency as instruments of the status quo (historical legacies repeated) or as instruments of change within relations of power. Santayana's initial observation has a special significance for the study, development and implementation of public education system school council policies, organizations, processes and practices as they pertain specifically to Aboriginal children, youth and adults. Schools involve social and political power relations. Schools are not neutral, objective or equitable on matters concerning racial, ethnocultural, class, gender and sexual differences.

The majority of Aboriginal children attend schools in the public education system at some point in their elementary and/or secondary school careers. The public system of education is based on the white western paradigm of education (Burns, 1996b). Are the characteristics of the relations of power of the past being reproduced within relationships of the present and the future? Are non-Native Ministry of Education and Training personnel, elected school board trustees, principals, teachers and school council members aware of their own agency and their legitimate role in the governance process and the process of educational change? The process of change to which I refer here is one which leads to a public education system which is beneficial and relevant to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students alike.

This paper illuminates and informs matters of agency, relations of power and the school governance (council) concept as a strategy leading to improved Native inclusiveness, relevancy, excellence and equity in public education pertaining specifically to Aboriginal children, youth and adults. Unless numerous issues are addressed, historical legacies of the past will be reproduced through the contrived practice, of school governance councils and schooling in the public system of education of which Aboriginal students are a part.

The case study findings reveal that school councils, in the public system of education, are being implemented within the context of the status quo in education and coercive relations of power in schools. School governance reform is being implemented as first order changes. First order changes are those that tend to be directed toward improvement of effectiveness and efficiency of what is already institutionalized in systems, without substantially altering the way existing roles and role relationships are performed (Fullan, 1994). What is required in the school governance change field are changes which result in second order change. Second order change seeks to alter the fundamental ways in which organizations are put together including new goals, structures, roles, and collaborative work cultures (Cuban, 1990). The challenge for school boards, schools, school councils, and Aboriginal communities will be to become more proactively involved in a broad range of second order changes -- changes that affect the culture and structure of schools; changes which result in the restructuring of roles and role relationships toward collaborative relations of power, involving trustees, school system personnel, parents and students, community partners in education, and school council members. The challenge is also in relation to restructuring role relationships resulting in effective collaborative relations of power involving parents and guardians of Native students, elders in Native communities, Native community organizations and associations, school personnel and members of other agencies and organizations in the wider community.

The case study findings reveal the need of a school council system in the public system of education that knows about, understands, recognizes and supports the culture, values, language and aspirations of the Aboriginal peoples; a people whose membership has experienced similar oppression throughout Canada, yet a group whose membership cannot in any way be classified as a homogenous group in Canada. The system to which I refer is one which both recognizes and supports through proactive collaborative relations of power the distinctiveness and uniqueness of the Aboriginal peoples, self-determination and self-government. This implies an overall recognition which is supported through Native inclusive provincial government, MET, district school board, school governance, and education practices which are inclusive and respectful of the Aboriginal peoples, throughout. Ethnocentricism can, in fact, be seen as synonymous with racism (Swann, 1985). The same is true with respect to the suppression of non-dominant culture in education and society. As the past reveals, suppression has been the first and foremost response to the Aboriginal peoples (Harper, 1997); a phenomenon which appears to be continuing today.

A conclusion to be drawn from the case study research is that in the public education system school councils are not Native inclusive organizations. As a result of this, the education and social interests, needs, aspirations, and expectations of Native parents and members of Native communities are not being taken into consideration or addressed by school council organizations. One of the implications is that school council reform needs to be conceptualized, discussed and implemented as a reform strategy leading to improved Native representation on school councils and Native inclusiveness in both school councils and public system schooling. There is a need of a school council system of inclusiveness in the public system of education that recognizes, values and actively supports the Aboriginal peoples as a distinct and unique peoples striving to regain self-determination; a people who have a right to education in the public system of education which is relevant, excellent and equitable as such education pertains specifically to Aboriginal students.

The author is aware of the current work of the Education Improvement commission (EIC); a commission formed in 1997 to oversee major changes, including strengthening the involvement of parents and their communities in schools, in the four systems of district school boards in Ontario: English language; English language Catholic, French language, and French language Catholic[4]. A close examination of the EIC document reveals that, if one was hopeful that the school council change process would serve as the basis for an awakening of public educational system consciousness regarding problems of Native inclusiveness in education and school councils as a strategy for the eventual improvement of public system education pertaining specifically to Aboriginal students, the discussion paper falls far short of expectations. The only reference to Native issues in the entire discussion paper is -- How can the interests of Native communities be best represented on school councils?

Within the white western paradigm of education, ethnocentrism, attitudes of racial and cultural superiority, the denial of difference and the suppression of difference as responses to the Aboriginal peoples is synonymous with racism and discrimination in education. Systemic discrimination in education results in the absence of Native inclusiveness in the public system of education and a lack of education relevance, education excellence and education equity pertaining specifically to Aboriginal students.

It is evident that there are numerous issues which need to be addressed regarding school councils and problems of schooling pertaining specifically to Aboriginal students. It is of vital importance that the Government of Ontario make the strongest possible commitments to ensuring the Aboriginal students attending schools in the public education system receive an education required to participate fully in the economy and to develop as citizens of Aboriginal communities -- with the knowledge of their language, culture, heritage, and traditions necessary for cultural continuity, self-determination and self-governance.

The Education Improvement Commission (EIC) is mandated to develop new district school boards, clarify the role of school board trustees and strengthen the involvement of parents and communities in their schools. The commission plans to present its recommendations on the future role of school councils to the Minister of Education and Training in early 1999. As a result of this, it is of utmost importance that the EIC organize, co-ordinate and carry out a comprehensive collaborative initiative

involving First Nations, Aboriginal political organizations, Native Friendship Centres, Aboriginal education authorities, and other Aboriginal jurisdictions and stakeholders including Aboriginal communities and parents and Elders of those communities in the development of a comprehensive policy to be included in legislation regarding the role of school councils pertaining specifically to Aboriginal parents, Elders, First Nations and urban Aboriginal communities. There is also a need of an overall provincial government policy regarding public system education pertaining specifically to First Nations tuition agreement students and Aboriginal students from urban communities. To that end, it is also imperative that the Government of Ontario work in collaboration with First Nations and other Aboriginal jurisdictions in the development and implementation of "Comprehensive Aboriginal Education Legislation and Policy", acceptable to the Aboriginal peoples.

ENDNOTES

1. In Canada, there are Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Aboriginal peoples exist as a distinct peoples who are considered separately from racial and ethno cultural minorities comprising the non-Aboriginal peoples of Canada. Within that distinctiveness, "Aboriginal" includes status Indians, non-status Indians, Inuit and Métis. As numerous reference materials and people use the term "Native", "Aboriginal" and "Native" are used interchangeably in this paper. "First Nations" refers to those Aboriginal peoples registered as Indians under the provision of the Indian Act.

2. By provincial schools, I mean publicly funded schools in the province of Ontario under the jurisdiction of Bill 104 district school boards and school authorities.

3. The White Paper exists as a classical example of how attitudes of racial and cultural superiority provide the basis for continuity in the intricate web of coercive relationships of socio-political power in education pertaining to the Aboriginal peoples, an overall approach which was responded to appropriately by the National Indian Brotherhood and the Assembly of First Nations.

4.See in particular the Education Improvement Commission Discussion Paper -- The Future Role of School Councils, May 1998. The document states that the four systems of district school boards exist as distinct and equal systems which address the rights of Ontario's Catholic and French speaking population, as guaranteed under the Canadian Constitution and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and that each system must involve a partnership of the province, district school boards, school communities, and parents -- all working together in the best interests of students. It also states that any model for community and parental involvement must respect the Constitutional and Charter guarantees surrounding Catholic and French language education. What about the Aboriginal peoples, a people who are distinct and unique? What about their inherent rights, their treaty rights, their Constitutional rights, their tuition agreement education rights, their rights to inclusiveness in education, and their rights to education relevance, education excellence and equity in education in the public education system? What about their rights to education in the public education system which prepares them to learn the skills they need to participate fully in the economy and to develop as citizens of Aboriginal communities -- with the knowledge of their language, history, beliefs, values, culture, traditions and world views necessary for cultural, spiritual, social, economic and political continuity? What is the future role of school councils in ensuring that Aboriginal students get the best possible education in terms of that education being, relevant, excellent, and equitable; and within the context of the Aboriginal people being distinct, unique and self-determined.

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